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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
26 April 1955

TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: Liberian presidential elections of May 1955

1. Offices to be filled: Presidency and vice presidency for a four-year term.
2. Parties or factions participating:

True Whig Party: The party of the ruling oligarchy of Americo-Liberians--a minority group of descendents of American slaves returned to Liberia. It has maintained itself in power since 1877 by tight control of its own small group and by restriction of the full participation of the numerically superior indigenous tribes. The party's orientation is determined by President Tubman, the present standard bearer. He is working for the rapid economic, educational, and social development of the country, for the assimilation of the native peoples into the political and social affairs of the country, and for the increased importance of Liberia in African and international affairs.

Independent True Whig Party: An opposition group of able but disgruntled Americo-Liberians, former members of the True Whig Party. They have some support among the tribal peoples. The group's primary aim appears to be to unseat Tubman rather than to differ in basic policy. The Independents charge the Tubman administration with maladministration, dictatorial rule, inefficiency, extravagance, and corruption. They are critical of Tubman's policy of assimilation of the tribal peoples, and the fact that Lebanese merchants, to the detriment of Liberians, are allowed to trade in the interior. They also charge that Tubman is selling out the country to foreign interests by his "open door" policy for foreign investors.

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3. Outstanding personalities: President William V. S. Tubman, 60, leader of the True Whig Party, and president since 1943. He and Vice President William R. Tolbert are seeking a third term. Tubman is pro-American.

Edwin Barclay, 72, the presidential candidate of the Independent True Whigs, was president from 1931-1943. He "hand-picked" Tubman as his successor, but has bitterly criticized him in recent years. Barclay is a decided nationalist and, though pro-American, has always been associated with the viewpoint that Liberia should exercise extreme caution in granting concessions to foreigners.

No opposition vice president has been selected. Important personalities among the Independents are: S. David Coleman, former secretary of the interior, Nete-Sie Brownell, former attorney general under Barclay, and Didwo Twe, Kru tribal leader currently in voluntary exile in Sierra Leone following his indictment for sedition as a result of his activities in the 1951 presidential elections.

4. Present Party Strengths: The True Whig Party is in complete control of the government, including total membership of the upper and lower houses of the legislature. Party control extends throughout the country as a result of the president's power to appoint all county, district, and provincial officers as well as the paramount chiefs of the hinterland tribes.

The strength of the Independent True Whig Party is unknown because this is the party's first test. It is composed of the followers of Barclay, Coleman, and Brownell, the remnants of the 1951 opposition party--the Reformation Party--and has some tribal support from the traditionally antigovernment Kru tribe, as well as from the Grebo people.

5. Principal issues: There do not appear to be any sharp differences in basic policy. Opposition groups have traditionally formed around election time in an effort to unseat the incumbents and attain office themselves. Despite Barclay's charges, his supporters maintain that he is not opposed to the assimilation of the native peoples or categorically opposed to granting foreign concessions. There has been no criticism of Tubman's foreign policy or pro-American position.

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Tubman stands on his record of having avoided external and internal strife, and of having increased the country's prosperity and participation in world affairs. He pledges greater economic, educational, and social development and plans to enlarge foreign investment, to strengthen defense, and to continue Liberia's association with other free nations.

6. Principal factors influencing the outcome: The incumbent True Whig Party will control the ballot box in this election. There is evidence that previous elections have been manipulated. The suffrage is restricted; the electorate has never exceeded 275,000 though the population is estimated to be between 1,500,000 and 2,000,000. The party gets both support and funds from the Americo-Liberians who are dependent on the government for jobs. All government employees are required to contribute at least one month's salary to the party, thus permitting it to build a large "war chest." Tubman is popular and a skillful politician, and he has heretofore successfully "salved" opposition groups and dissidents within his own party. He has also been able to bring in the hinterland vote through his control and careful cultivation of the chiefs.
7. Background: Opposition parties are formed just prior to a presidential election and then fade rapidly following their defeat at the polls. No effective opposition movement has yet been organized among the tribes. In the 1951 presidential elections, Tubman ran unopposed following the disqualification of the Reformation Party, which failed to fulfill certain election rules. Reformation Party leaders and supporters were subsequently arrested and tried for sedition for their activities prior to the election.
8. Informed opinion on outcome: Some inroads have reportedly been made by the Barclay group, but all American observers are agreed that Tubman will be re-elected.
9. Significance for US security interests: There is no direct security significance. Even in the unlikely event that Barclay should become president, it would not endanger American interests or the existing friendly Liberian-American relations.

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